

**Textile Recycling Meeting Summary**  
**September 27, 2011**  
**MassDEP Offices - Boston**

**Meeting Objective:** Bring together stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors to discuss how to increase recovery of post-consumer textiles for reuse and recycling in Massachusetts.

**Attendees:**

Goodwill Industries - Boston  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul - Boston  
Salvation Army - Boston  
Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles (SMART)  
Council for Textile Recycling  
Millbury Textile Recycling  
Trans-Americas Textile Recycling  
ERC Wiping Products  
The Chesapeake Group  
MassRecycle  
MassDEP

**MassDEP Textile Data:**

- Textiles comprise 4.9% of the waste received at Massachusetts waste combustors, as determined in six waste characterization studies performed in fall 2010 and winter 2011.
- This breaks down into 5.8% in the residential waste stream and 3.7% in the commercial waste stream
- This translates to approximately 260,000 tons of textiles that could be diverted annually from disposal for reuse, wiping materials and fiber conversion.
- 100 municipalities (out of 277 reporting) said they collect textiles (presumably at transfer station drop-boxes) on DEP's 2010 Municipal Recycling Survey.

**Overview of Textile Recycling Industry:**

- The term "textiles" includes clothing, shoes, belts, hats, undergarments, bedding, linens, towels, fabric and curtains/draperies, including items that are stained, torn, missing buttons, zippers, etc.
- Approximately 95% of all textiles can be recycled
- The non-recyclable textile fraction (5%) is wet, mildewed or oily.
- Nationally, about 15% of textiles are recycled; the other 85% go to landfills and waste combustors
- The "life cycle" for textile recycling is:
  - Donation to charities
  - Charities sort and resell wearable/usable items (approx 15% of what they take in)
  - Charities bale and sell the other 85% to the "salvage market" (brokers, graders) - about 15% of their revenue comes from this salvage revenue
  - Graders sort textiles into 3 categories of end-use:
    - Usable and repairable clothing, shoes—exported to developing countries (~ 45%)
    - Wiping cloths (domestic industry) (~30%)
    - Fiber conversion (companies like Millbury Textile Recycling convert textiles into carpet backing, stuffing, insulation for cars) (~20%)
    - The remaining ~5% is disposed.
- Prices for baled textiles are at historical high due to high demand and supply shortages.

- The typical timeframe for this process is 30-60 days.
- Trans America receives about 80% of its textiles from charities and about 20% from municipalities.
- Textile recycling, like other sectors of the recycling industry, generates economic activity and jobs. Goodwill created 7,000 new jobs across the country last year.
- The social benefits are significant as well. These include jobs for the physically and mentally challenged, rehabilitation programs for substance abusers, provision of clothing for low-income, homeless and needy in this country as well as in developing countries.
- Commercial laundries (large hotels, hospitals, nursing homes) sell old linens, bedding to wiping cloth manufacturers. ERC buys about 20,000 lbs a week from greater Boston commercial sources.
- Goodwill has partnership with Zoots dry cleaning chain. There are clothing donation bins in each store for customers to donate. Zoots' policy is items not retrieved 6 months after dry cleaning are put into Goodwill bins.
- Goodwill also partnering with Boston University to collect textiles during end-of-school-year move-out days. The slogan is "Goodwill, Not Landfill".

## **Major discussion points:**

### **1. Public confusion over what can and can't be included in clothing/textile donations**

Many charities and textile collection programs specify that donations must be gently worn, or reusable. Even the most dedicated recyclers are throwing away damaged clothing instead of donating because they don't want to burden charities with unwanted material that they'll ultimately pay to dispose of.

In fact, all sectors represented at the meeting agreed that ALL textiles (including shoes, belts, bedding, towels, and clothing in any condition – ripped, stained, missing buttons, zippers) are acceptable. Not only are they acceptable, they are desirable. The more donations received, the more good the charities can do (and the more revenue they earn), which generates more feedstock for conversion to wiping cloths and fiber conversion. The only limiting factor is that the textiles need to be clean and dry.

Goodwill stated that while their marketing material says "gently used clothing", they will take EVERYTHING. 15-20% of donations received are put into retail stores; the rest is sold to salvage markets. Overall, about 98% of donations are diverted (retail or salvage); the 2% that is disposed as trash is either wet/mildewed or dirty (meaning oily or otherwise contaminated with hazardous materials). Goodwill also has an "As Is" retail location where items not in perfect condition are sold as is.

### **2. Transparency among textile collection box operators**

The clothing drop-off boxes that have proliferated in shopping malls, gas stations and public spaces are not transparent in terms of who's operating them. Many display a charity's name or have signs stating that they support charities or the poor and needy. Verifying these claims is difficult. Many for-profit companies operate textile collection networks and donate a portion of their proceeds to a charity, in exchange for the use of their name on the boxes. Some of these operations provide tax deductible donation receipts.

The Connecticut Attorney General's office requires registration and transparency for this industry so the public can get answers about who they are donating to, if they so desire. SMART has a transparency policy for their members and they advocate for the adoption of state laws on transparency for donation boxes operators.

### **3. Charities relationships to recyclers (wiping cloth and salvage industry) and for-profit collection drop-box operations**

Charities and the textile recyclers (wiping cloths and fiber converters) have a symbiotic relationship. Textiles that are not reusable are sold to textile recyclers, generating an additional revenue source. Charities provide valuable feedstock to the wiping cloth manufacturers and fiber conversion businesses.

Charities expressed some concern about the competition from non-charitable donation boxes and stores at municipal sites. They and the other industry members, including SMART and Council for Textile Recycling would like to see transparency among program operators.

Charities are often competing with the for profit collectors who offer to pay a municipality for textiles if they will allow a donation box at the transfer station or public works yard. Charities can't pay for their donations, so they may be shut out of opportunities to collect at municipal facilities. One suggestion was that municipalities could stipulate that a certain percentage of the revenue from a drop-box be donated to charity and require the operator to provide documentation.

### **4. How to increase capture of textiles?**

Textile recycling needs to become as familiar and easy as bottle, can and paper recycling. It needs to be integrated into every municipal recycling program.

Messages that will resonate with municipalities include the savings in avoided disposal costs and the ease of collecting textiles (they're not messy, breakable, hazardous or malodorous).

Massachusetts has 134 communities with unit-based pricing (or Pay-Per-Bag) for residential trash collection. MassDEP provides grants and technical assistance to help communities implement Pay-Per-Bag because it incentivizes residents to minimize what they throw out and to maximize reuse/recycling. In addition, more and more communities are going to cart system that limits residents to 64 gallons of trash capacity each week. Residents must purchase special trash bags for excess trash or buy additional collection service. Textiles represent another segment of the waste stream that will reduce trash and save residents money.

There's already a robust textile recycling market and a mature collection and processing infrastructure for all kinds of textiles. We just need to get people to use the system instead of disposing of textiles as trash.

School textile drives work well and can generate revenue for schools. Goodwill held a drive at a North Andover elementary school and collected 9 tons of materials in 2 weeks. Since the drive ended, donations at Goodwill's attended donation center in North Andover have increased 50%. They attribute this to greater awareness and understanding about the wide range and condition of items they accept.

Curbside collection of textiles is not recommended because the material can get wet (which renders it non-recyclable) and pilfering can be a problem.

A request that DEP consider a disposal ban on textiles was raised.

### **Follow up/Next Steps:**

- Issue press release about textile recycling –SMART, charities, with quote from DEP commissione
- Develop a unified and consistent message about textile recycling and publicize to municipalities, environmental groups, non-profits, schools, community groups, etc. Perhaps a communications workgroup should be convened to address how this message will be conveyed statewide?
- Contact other Goodwill and Salvation Army management to seek buy-in for uniform state-wide message
- Hold textile recycling workshops for municipal officials in 4 regions of state (MassDEP/MassRecycle)
- Include textile recycling listings in a state-wide recycling website for the general public (MassDEP). SMART has a consumer recycling directory for textiles (in association with Earth911) on their website.
- Update list of textile reuse and recycling options on Mass Material Trader website (MassDEP)
- Gather information on transparency requirements in other states. Are there reasonable standards that could help clarify the various elements within industry. Maybe AG sees as consumer affairs issue.
- Gather information on successful municipal textile recycling programs; develop case studies/guidance
- Solicit textile recycling projects through DEP's municipal grant program
- Explore other initiatives –
  - a. Collection containers at laundromats?
  - b. Dry cleaners (independents) – MassDEP has a communication network because dry cleaners are required to certify compliance with regulations to us annually
  - c. College move-outs – the abundance of colleges/universities in greater Boston and Worcester are fertile ground for capturing textiles, as demonstrated by Goodwill's partnership with BU.
  - d. Promote textile recycling drives at schools, through MassDEP's Green Team (school environmental education program)
  - e. Develop fact sheet on textile recycling for DEP website
  - f. Develop case studies of municipal textile recycling programs
  - g. Provide grant funding for innovative municipal textile recycling programs through Sustainable Materials Recovery Program